Erin Caldwell

Composition 1

Mrs. Caldwell

February 2, 2016

Marsupials

Some of the most unique mammals in the animal kingdom are marsupials. Marsupials usually give birth to undeveloped live young and then carry them in pouches until offspring are developed enough. Pregnancy is very short often no more than four weeks. Some of the most well-known marsupials are kangaroos, koalas, and opossums.

First, kangaroos are the biggest group of marsupials. Kangaroos are easily identified by their appearance. While there are four different types of kangaroos, red kangaroo; western grey kangaroo; eastern grey kangaroo; and antelope, kangaroos all have the same distinctive features (Bradford). To help them travel fast and leap high in the air, they have strong back legs and powerful tails. Their fur, ranging from brown to gray to red depending on type, is short and thick (“Kangaroo”). Their height varies from three to eight feet and they can weigh anywhere between 40 and 200 pounds (“Kangaroo Fact Sheet”).

Kangaroos also have a distinctive diet from other marsupials. They are similar to cows in that they “regurgitate their food and re-chew it before it is ready to be totally digested” (Bradford). As herbivores, they eat mostly grass. They can also live for a long time without much water (“Basic Facts about Kangaroos”).

Additionally, kangaroos are found only in Australia. There are even some types that are becoming endangered (Bradford).  They live in different types off habitat including forests and savannahs (“Basic Facts about Kangaroos”). Different types prefer different homes. According to Alina Bradford, “The musky rat-kangaroo likes to nestle down in little nests on the floor of the rainforests in northeastern Queensland.” On the other hand, other kangaroos prefer to live at the tops of trees (Bradford).

Second, the next major group of marsupials is koalas. Because of their appearance, koalas are often mistaken for bears. They have plump, fuzzy bodies with cute little ears and a distinctive large, black, rubber-looking nose. Koalas have two opposing thumbs with sharp claws that help them hang on to trees as well as rough, ridged pads on their feet and hands that give them excellent traction (*National Geographic*). Also, they also have especially strong arm and shoulder muscles to help them climb (“Koala Habitat”).

Koalas also have a very specific diet. They eat mostly eucalyptus leaves which “are poisonous to most animals but koalas have a special bacteria in their digestive tract that break down the toxic compounds” (*San Diego Zoo*). They do not drink much water because they get so much liquid from the leaves themselves, and they also do not get many calories from their diet (*National Geographic*). They conserve energy by moving little and sleeping a lot.

Koalas only live in Australia, but their habitat can differ. Their habitat varies from costal islands to forests and woodlands, but koalas always live the majority of their lives in trees. Koalas, like humans, live in societies so the habitat needs to be large enough and have enough food sources to support a large group (“Koala Habitat”). Much of their preferred habitat, however, has been urbanized and made dangerous or unfit for them to thrive (*National Geographic*).

Thirdly, opossums are some marsupials that are common in many places around the world. However, they have a much less attractive appearance than other marsupials because they are quite rodent-like. They walk on all fours and have a long rat-like tail that helps them with balance. Their sharp teeth and beady eyes really make them look like overgrown mice (Smith). (Excerpt only from here until the conclusion)

Opossums’ diet is unique in that they will eat almost anything.

In addition to eating a wide range of food, opossums can also live almost anywhere that has a moderate climate.

In conclusion, marsupials are very interesting animals, the most well-known being kangaroos, koalas, and opossums. Learning more about these unique mammals enhances our knowledge of the complexity of the natural world. To learn more about these amazing creatures, check out NOVA’s program on marsupials. It’s fascinating!

Works Cited

“Basic Facts about Kangaroos.” *Defenders of Wildlife*. 2016, http://www.defenders.org/kangaroo/basic-facts. Accessed 2 February 2016.

Bradford, Alina. “Kangaroo Facts.” *Livescience,* 2 Februaary 2016, http://www.livescience.com/27400-kangaroos.html. Accessed 22 August 2016.

“Kangaroo.” *Kidsplanet.org*. Defenders of Wildlife. http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/kangaroo.html. Accessed 2 February 2016.

“Kangaroo Fact Sheet.” *Nature.* PBS, 10 January 2012, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/kangaroo-mob-kangaroo-fact-sheet/7444. Accessed 2 February 2016.

“Koala.” *San Diego Zoo Animals*. San Diego Zoo Global, http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/koala. Accessed 2 February 2016.

“Koala.” *National Geographic.* National Geographic Society, animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/koala. Accessed 2 February 2016.

“Koala Habitat.” *Australian Koala Foundation.* Australian Koala Foundation, https://www.savethekoala.com/about-koalas/koala-habitat. Accessed 2 February 2016.

Smith, John. *Opossums in America.* Random House, 1999.